

February 6, 2006

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WASHINGTON, DC—U.S. Congressmen Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Greg Walden (R-OR) issued the below statements in response to inclusion of partial reauthorization of the crucial county payments law in President Bush's fiscal year 2007 budget. This law, which provides essential funding to counties throughout America containing federal forestland, is set to expire at the end of fiscal year 2006 and requires congressional reauthorization and appropriations to continue. DeFazio and Walden are coauthors of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Reauthorization Act, H.R. 517.

"I'm pleased to see that the president supports reauthorizing the critical county payments program, but the funding levels are inadequate," said DeFazio. "Congressman Walden and I have organized a strong, bipartisan coalition in the House that will use the president's proposal as a start, but we aim to reauthorize and fully fund the program. We have an obligation to support the rural Oregonians who for decades have been stewards of our federal lands. Ending the county payments program would abandon that century-long promise and economically devastate those communities."

"It's most helpful to have the President's budget call for reauthorization of the county roads and schools program, and to have it provide some level of funding. That gives us a starting point that we never had with the Clinton administration's budgets. However, it's only a starting point, and a distant one from where we need to finish. We've already put together a strong coalition in the Congress and across the country. The federal government must keep its century-old commitment to forested communities and I won't stop working until it does," said Walden.

H.R. 517 reauthorizes Public Law 106-393, introduced in 1999 and enacted in October 2000. More information on H.R. 517 can be found at <http://thomas.loc.gov>.